

# How Caregivers Can Help a Person in Pain

Sometimes people who are very ill need help from family members and friends to get the pain relief they need. If someone you love is seriously ill, there are many things you can do to help:



**Find** out all you can about your loved one's pain. Make a list of questions for the doctor or nurse.

**Go** with your loved one to his or her doctor's appointment. Take along your list of questions. Take notes during the appointment to remind everyone of what was said.

**Help** your loved one take all medications as instructed. This may mean taking it on a regular schedule and around the clock. Plan ahead, so that prescriptions don't run out on nights, weekends or holidays.

**If** the regular doctor's treatment plan doesn't work or causes too many unpleasant side effects, help your loved one find a pain specialist. Local hospices can suggest doctors who are experts at pain management.

## THE PAIN PROBLEM

People with serious illnesses face many challenges. One they fear most is pain.

But pain does not have to be a part of being very sick. Most people, even those living with cancer, can have their pain controlled with simple, affordable treatment.

If you are in pain, you must talk to your doctor, clearly explain your wishes and ask for treatment. This brochure will help you begin this important conversation.



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Community-State Partnership  
to Improve End-of-Life Care,  
an independent,  
non-profit organization.

# Pain



## Questions to ask your doctor

"Pain: Questions to ask your doctor," is adapted with permission from the "Rhode Island Consumer Guide to Pain," written by Joan M. Teno, M.D., Associate Professor of Community Health and Medicine, Brown University Center for Gerontology and Health Care Research; and the "Pain Action Guide," American Pain Foundation, Baltimore, MD.

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## IMPROVING END-OF-LIFE CARE



# Getting Ready to Talk to Your Doctor

To receive the pain treatment you want, begin by asking your doctor for extra time to talk about your pain, its causes and treatment. Your report of pain is essential to good pain management.

## Be prepared to answer these questions:

- Where is the pain?
- When did it start?
- When do you get the pain?  
Is it constant or does it come and go?
- What does it feel like? Use words like sharp, stabbing, dull, aching, burning, tingling, deep, pressing, etc.
- How intense is it? Mild, moderate, severe?  
Rate it on a scale from zero (no pain) to 10 (the worst pain you can imagine).
- Is your pain better or worse than the last visit?
- What makes it worse? (moving, coughing, or walking?)
- How is pain affecting your sleep? Mood? Daily activities?
- What makes it better? (medicine, lying down, music, heat or cold?)
- What other medications are you taking? (Bring a list.)

**Don't delay!**  
A pain emergency is difficult to manage. Pain is easier to treat when it is mild than when it is severe.



# 10 Questions to Ask Your Doctor

## Ask your doctor or pain specialist to explain:

1. What is causing my pain?
2. What is the treatment plan?
3. What are the benefits of this approach?
4. What are the negative side effects? (sleepiness, itching, nausea, constipation) How long will they last? How are they treated?
5. What should I monitor and call you about?
6. What should I do if my pain worsens?
7. When will you check again to see how I am responding to this treatment plan?
8. What is the cost of this medication?
9. Is there a lower-cost option?
10. Are there other useful approaches? Can I use complementary treatments such as relaxation and breathing exercises, massage or cold and heat packs?

If your regular doctor cannot help you with treatment for your pain – or if your medication is not working — you can ask for a referral to a pain specialist or pain clinic. There are many advances in this area of medicine and these specialists have up-to-date training in pain treatment.



# FACTS and MYTHS about Pain Treatment



*Myths and fears about pain medicines should not keep someone who is seriously ill from getting good pain relief.*

**Myth:** I may become “hooked” or “addicted” to pain medicine.

**Fact:** Studies show that patients being treated for pain very rarely become addicted to their pain medications. Sometimes a person’s body will get used to the pain medicine and require a larger dose. This is common, and it is called tolerance. Talk to a doctor or pain specialist if this happens. The doctor may increase the level of medication or switch to another type.

**Myth:** People get morphine only when they are dying.

**Fact:** The amount of pain determines which medicine to use. If morphine or a similar strong pain medicine is offered, don’t panic. Some people never need morphine. Others will require it for quite a while. Morphine does not shorten life.

